Mr. Average: Nixon hiding something

President Nixon must have "something to hide" in the Watergate tapes he has refused to release, but the President should not be impeached, according to Mr. Average American, Richard Johnson.

Johnson, the Rolling Meadows man selected last year by computers as representative of the average American, said yesterday Mr. Nixon's firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox and Deputy Atty. Gen. William Ruckelshaus and the resignation of Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson during the weekend indicate the tapes must reveal information the President cannot afford to have made public.

MR. NIXON ordered Cox fired rather than abide by a court order to relinquish the tape recordings of White House conversations bearing on the Watergate matter to the special prosecutor. Richardson resigned because of the firing and Ruckelshaus was dismissed when he refused to fire Cox.

"To me it seems that there really must be something in those tapes that he (the President) wants to hide," Johnson said. "First he appoints someone to do a job and then when he gets close to something, he's fired.

"But I hope for his sake he is not impeached," Johnson added. "I wouldn't want to see any president impeached. That's a very drastic action and I hope for his sake it doesn't come to that."

Johnson's opinions on national, and particularly presidential affairs, have become public interest ever since he was selected as the subject of two television documentaries by the National Public Affairs Center for Television in Washington, one dealing with the pressures of inflation on an average family, and the other a first-hand look at the presidential campaign from the eyes of a typical American.

After spending one week with the George McGovern presidential campaign last year, Johnson revealed after the election that he had voted for President Nixon, the first Republican presidential candidate to win Johnson's vote in 20 years.

BUT FOLLOWING the Watergate revelations earlier this year, Johnson declared he would not have voted in the election had he known of the illegal campaign activities beforehand.

"I don't know if he's that confident that Congress won't start impeachment proceedings against him," Johnson said of the President. "But once someone starts the ball rolling, that's all it takes.

"I just can't fathom what could be in those tapes that would cause him to do this," he said of the weekend firings. "There must be something very valuable in those tapes that he doesn't want disclosed."

"HERE IS a situation where a top man

Richard Johnson

gets something started toward uncovering this matter and then he is fired. He (Mr. Nixon) must feel he has some special powers in being the president that he can do this.

"It (the Watergate affair) just keeps getting bigger and bigger," Johnson said. "All I can say is Tricky Dick must be pretty sure he is not going to be impeached or else maybe he's so far gone, to use an expression, that he doesn't care anymore. It's a big mess."

And while he may not go along with a call for impeachment, Mr. Average American added, "I won't be satisfied with Watergate until something concrete is resolved on those tapes."